

CHAPTER 5 HOUSING

Shelter is a basic need of human settlement. Area housing and housing opportunities available to area residents have important impacts upon the physical environment and the quality of life.

This chapter reviews housing and household characteristics; discusses housing issues; and outlines a strategy for improving local housing and housing opportunities, the Housing Plan.

EXISTING HOUSING

Housing within Denton is predominantly single-family. From the total housing stock of 65 dwelling units 47 are conventionally constructed single-family units, 12 are (single family) mobile homes and 6 units can be roughly defined as apartments. One three-unit apartment house is a conversion from what was originally a single-family dwelling. Two apartment units are located above the steak house and another unit is located behind the Post Office.

From 1961 to 1976, the number of dwelling units more than doubled and average household size decreased by .7 persons. Such statistics suggest a quantum improvement in housing conditions. Certainly crowding is less of a problem but the idea that a majority of the housing is less than 15 years old is a little misleading. Much of the new housing has come not from new construction but from mobile homes or old farm dwellings moved into town and an apartment house converted from an existing single family home.

TABLE 6
HOUSING TYPES

	<u>1961</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1976</u>
Conventional Single Family	25	45	47
Mobile Homes	2	2	12
"Apartment" Units	2	2	6
TOTAL	<u>29</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>65</u>

Source: Planning Department

HOUSING ISSUES

The discussion that follows centers upon housing problems considered more serious by residents in the Attitude Survey (see question 16 of Appendix 1). In order of seriousness, the perceived problems are (1) "cost of rents too high", (2) "deterioration of older housing", (3) "lack of available housing", (4) "household incomes too low", (5) "choice of housing types", (8) "not enough low income housing", and (9) "not enough apartment units". "Too much low income housing" generally was not considered a problem.

Costs (or Rents) Too High

If the cost of housing is too high, the question is, "compared to what?" -- the cost of housing in previous years, the cost of other goods and services, or household income. The suspicion is that "high cost" is perceived as a general problem -- the problem of increasing prices for a broad spectrum of goods and services -- inflation.

Beyond the general problem of inflation, increased costs can be attributed to the fact that Denton now supplies housing in a growing regional (Lincoln) housing market. Increased demand for housing in Denton has increased the costs and rents of available housing. Because Denton provides such a small percentage (approximately 1/10 of one percent) of the housing in Lancaster County, any reasonable increase in the local supply would have little or no impact upon its price.

The "high" costs of local housing, brought about by the forces of international inflation and a growing regional demand for housing is a fact of life that Denton is powerless to control.

Denton might be able to reduce the effective cost of housing by reducing taxes or user fees. However, from the results of the Attitude Survey, residents are demanding increases in services even if it means increased taxes or user fees. Utility costs can be minimized by encouraging infill development and not permitting community development to occur in areas that can not be served by reasonably economical extensions of the utility systems.

Incomes Too Low

As incomes and costs are only relative, perhaps Denton should pursue a strategy of increasing incomes rather than one of reducing costs per se. Lack of income is addressed in the goal statement as follows: "Recognizing that a number of housing problems are the result of a lack of income, support improvement of local household incomes particularly the lower income".

Crowding and deterioration are typical of housing problems aggravated by the demand for low cost housing by the low income. Low income households attempt to reduce their housing costs by occupying less space person (crowding) or by buying or renting depreciated housing (deterioration).

The condition of the poorest housing can be improved by increases in the incomes of the lowest income households. "Incomes" can be increased by an improved economy, resultant improvement in employment, and programs ranging from education and vocational training to housing assistance and income guarantees.

Many of such programs should be initiated, coordinated and financed at the federal, state or county level. With financial assistance from the federal government by way of Community Development Block Grant Funds, Denton could provide housing assistance or other permitted projects such as sewer and water that should benefit "people of lower and middle income". Housing assistance efforts should be coordinated at the county level.

Lack of Available Housing (or Land)

The lack of available housing or land available for new housing construction is a problem related to other problems, all caused in part by the same factor--increased demand for housing in Denton because of the growing regional housing market. Increased demand has created what appears to be a short supply. The fact is that not only have prices increased but so has the supply of housing. However, the target population indicates that Denton will remain a small town and will not provide a significant amount of housing in the regional housing market.

The future housing supply in Denton should meet the expected needs of its future population -- the year 2000 target population.

Deterioration and Poor Construction

Deterioration of older housing is addressed in a goal statement as follows: "Improve housing conditions and appearance of housing areas by rehabilitation or demolition of deteriorated structures...". Improved demand for housing will encourage private rehabilitation and the replacement of deteriorated structures with new construction and hopefully encourage quality new construction. Public action should be coordinated with private such as supplying needed public services and the adoption of needed regulations such as building codes and a housing ordinance. Community Development Funds could be used for code enforcement, rehabilitation and demolition.

Lack of Choice in Housing

Lack of choice of housing types, not enough low income housing, and not enough apartment units are related problems as perhaps are all housing problems. These problems are addressed in the following goal statement: "Recognize the general preference for the single family dwelling and the need to maintain a diversified range of housing costs or rents and housing types, including mobile homes, duplexes and small apartments, to meet the needs of varied household incomes and preferences".

The Attitude Survey reveals that 98% of the Denton area households would prefer to live in a single family house. The fact that only 72% of dwelling units in Denton are that type can be attributed to simple economics -- lack of income to fulfill desire for a conventional single family home.

Only when every household in Denton, or likely to move to Denton, is moderately wealthy will everyone desiring a single family home be able to afford one. Although certainly incomes should increase, there will be a continuing need to supply alternative housing types, not only for those that may continue to be unable to afford a single family home, but also for those that may desire an alternative or those unable to maintain a single family home, such as the elderly and handicapped.

HOUSING PLAN

Denton will continue to rely upon the private housing industry and the prevailing market forces to keep costs down, increase the supply of housing, and provide a variety of housing types at a variety of price levels. However, there are a number of actions that the Village plans to undertake to improve housing in the Denton area.

The Village will gradually open up new lands west of town for housing development and coordinate the provision of adequate public services to new and existing housing at reasonable cost. The Village will adopt whatever land use and building regulations are needed to insure existing and future residents a safe and decent living environment.

In addition, Denton will cooperate and seek the assistance of other levels of government and the appropriate agencies in an attempt to improve local income, housing opportunities, and housing conditions. The Lincoln Housing Authority will be encouraged to provide housing assistance county-wide and to include Denton. Denton will seek Federal Community Development Block Grant Funds and as required will complete a Housing Assistance Plan (HAP) itself or cooperate in a regional (county-wide) effort to complete such requirements. As part of a HAP, Denton will survey local housing conditions and needs.